

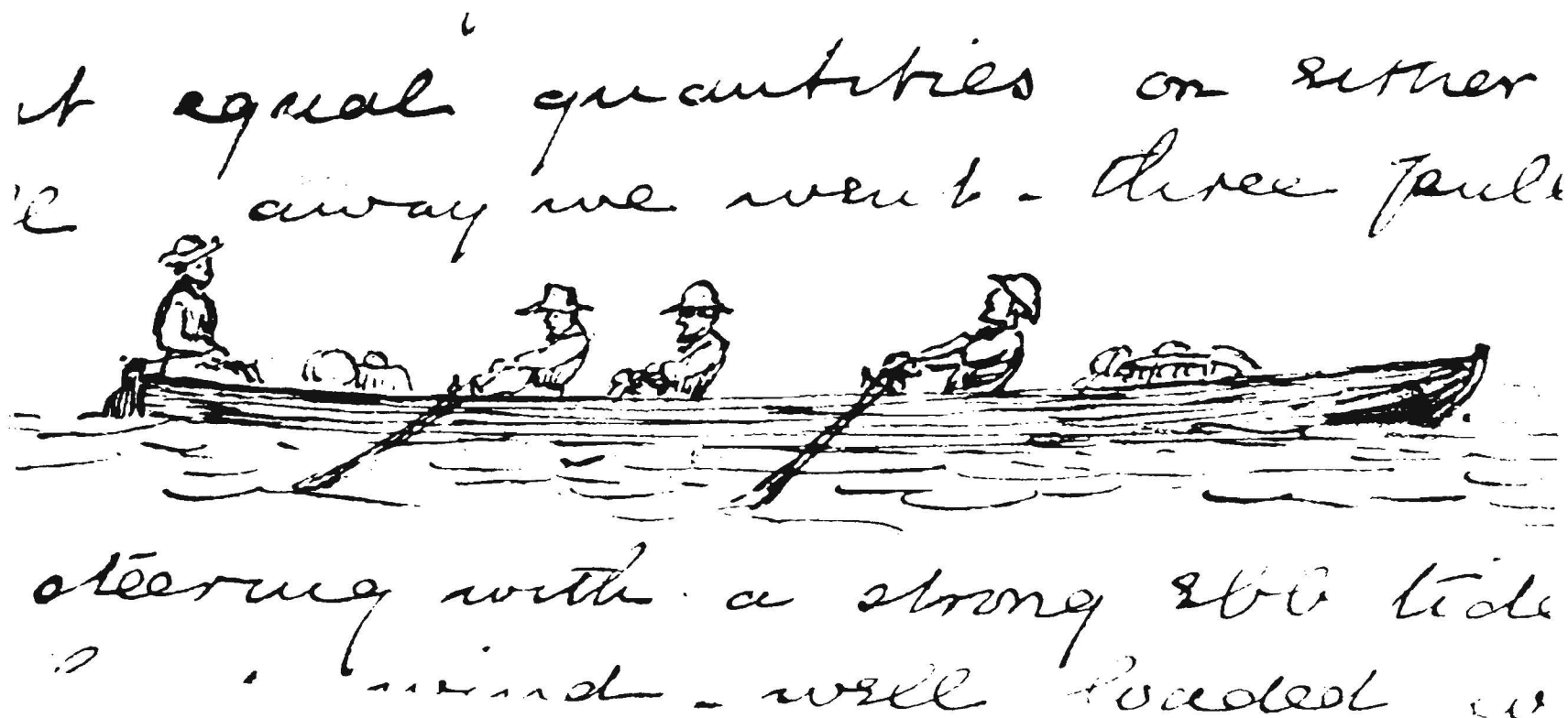
## A Voyage to Caloundra

*On 30 April 1865, from Kangaroo Point, Brisbane, Alexander Archer wrote a letter to his young niece in England. Most of his letter described in detail an excursion by boat which Alexander and three companions had recently made from Brisbane to Caloundra. The letter was illustrated by pen sketches and was accompanied by a map, showing the party's route. This letter, now held in the Oxley Memorial Library of Queensland, is reproduced below. Passages dealing with family matters have been omitted. The original spelling and punctuation have been retained except for a few cases where the author's punctuation marks are indistinct. The letter is thought to have been written to Alice, a daughter of David Archer. David, the third son of the famous*

*family, arrived in New South Wales in 1834. As part of the family partnership he helped to take up Durundur (near the present town of Woodford), Emu Creek, Cooyar (Moreton) and Coonambula and Eidsvold runs in the Burnett. He returned to England in 1852, having been associated with the Moreton and Burnett areas for eleven years. Alexander Archer, born in 1828, came to Australia and joined the Bank of New South Wales in 1852. He was with the Bank in Victoria and then transferred to the Brisbane office, where he became Manager in 1865, a post which he retained until his death. He and his wife were amongst the victims of the Quetta disaster of February 1890.*

As I think it would amuse papa I will tell you something about a trip four of us took to the Bay a few days ago when we were very near some places well known to him when he lived here many years ago. I suppose you know that it is not only school boys and girls who are fond of holidays. Some old people like myself enjoy them nearly as much as when they were boys. We had about four days, so we started from Brisbane about one o'clock one afternoon in a four oared gig, 28 feet six inches long with a beam of 4½ feet and fitted with two small sails which could only be used with a fair wind as the boat had no keel — indeed it may be described as a rather heavy racing gig. This kind of boat is well adapted for exploring the sheltered parts of the bay as she only draws 5 or 6 inches of water which enabled us often to go over mud flats, with which the shores of the Bay abound, when a boat of heavier draught would remain stuck in the mud for hours. And when we did stick, which happened very often, we had only to jump overboard into the shallow water and push the boat into deeper water. But it is not very safe to go far from the land with such a boat because her build prevents her rising to the waves which she just cuts in two and ships in about equal quantities on either bow.

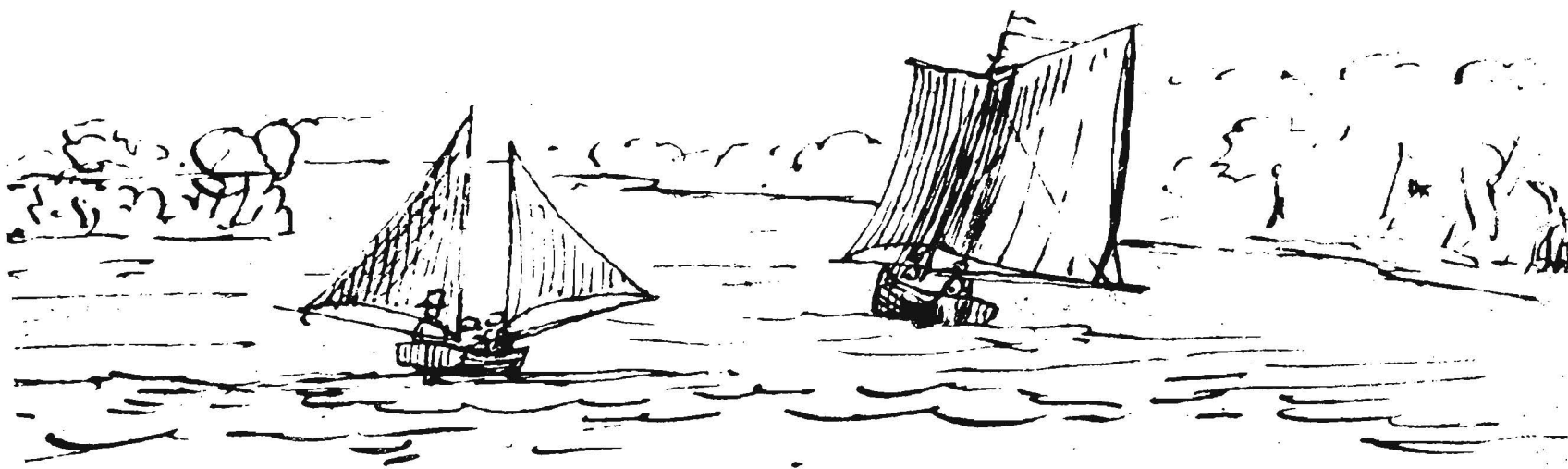
smooth water beyond and so we got ashore just as it was getting dark. Of course we were all drenched with the nice warm seawater and our provisions and blankets did not escape so that instead of camping on the beach as we had intended we had our things taken up to an Inn at Sandgate and passed the night there so as to get the meat and bedding dried which we did in a kind of way. Sandgate is now one of the favorite watering places to which Brisbane people go for a few days during the hottest part of the summer. It is still quite new and there is little comfort to be had there but it has 2 or 3 Inns and Mr John McConell who bought Durundur from papa has built a nice house and lives there with his wife. Sandgate is about 12 miles from Brisbane by land but I should think nearly double that distance by water. It is built on one of the highest bluffs I have seen in the bay about 50 to 70 feet I should say and those who have land there are asking from £500 to £1000 for a piece not much bigger than your house and garden. Next morning I saw a man coming up from the water with some very ugly fish. One had a long snout like a saw and a long tail but where his eyes and mouth were I had not time to find out. It was something like a stingaree with the saw added, and that is a very ugly fellow too, with spikes in



Well away we went, three pulling and one steering with a strong ebb tide and pretty stiff head wind, well loaded with provisions and blankets, a tent, gun etc etc and we pulled away for about 14 miles which brought us to the mouth of the river intending to make Sandgate that night, which we did but not before we had a good soaking as you shall hear. The tracing which I send will give you an idea of our course. Well when we had gone into the bay a good bit so as to avoid the mud flats we had a fair wind for Sandgate, so we up sail and stood for it and were getting along capitally till within about half a mile of the place, when I thought I saw shoal water and breakers ahead and advised that the sails should be doused, but the advice came too late, for before we knew where we were a breaker came over her side then another and another until we were about a third full of water. "We shall be swamped! we shall be swamped!" cried one of the fellows a good deal frightened forgetting that we were in shoal water. "What shall we do" said another one. "Put her head to the sea" bawled I thinking myself very wise. However we did so, which did not mend matters much for she only cut into the waves being so long herself that she could not rise to them so the end of it was that we all jumped overboard (not deeper than our knees) and shoved her right thro' the breakers into deep and

his tail which he sticks into anybody when he gets a chance, but that seldom happens. The most of the fish caught about the mud banks are ugly slimy things and none of the fish I have seen in this country are half as pretty as a salmon or trout.

After breakfast we resumed our voyage in the direction of Bribie's Island the northern extremity of which we had sketched out for ourselves as the limit of our trip, and as none of the party had been there before we promised ourselves something of the pleasure which people take in traversing unknown regions and we were not disappointed in this. Some people in Brisbane told us before we started that the Bribie blacks had a bad name which was partly the reason that that part of the bay is visited less than others but they have done nothing very bad to white people for a long time so that there was nothing to fear from them. Papa's friend Johnny Little told me to say "brother belonging to Davie" if they wanted to eat me and to ask for "Beerwah Jimmy and his brass plate" which he said would put them in a good humour but you will find that I had no occasion to use these talismans or pass words. We first steered for the nearest point of the Redcliff headland, pulling the most of the way, for luckily it was nearly calm, and we landed and bathed near a place called Humpy Bong so



## *The Race - which we won -*

called I suppose because it is an abandoned Government settlement and humpy means a house and Bong is dead in the language of the Blacks. In this way I am told that a place on papa's old station of Durandur which proved very fatal to the sheep goes by the name of Monkey Bong, monkey being the name the Blacks have for sheep. Mr McConnell told me this. Much refreshed after our bathe we again took to our oars and soon came in sight of Bribie and steered a course which we thought would strike the southern entrance to the Channel between the island and mainland and which we managed to hit to a nicety. Soon after leaving the last land at Redcliff a light breeze sprang up which carried us right across the Cabulture or Deception bay and about 6 miles up the channel which saved us a pull of about 15 miles. Whilst crossing Cabulture bay we took lunch consisting of smoked leg of mutton bread and gin and water which we enjoyed, all but one of us who was squeamish and rather sentimental. The entrance to the channel is very pretty especially on the mainland which is 60 or 70 feet high and looks as if it were artificially terraced. The place I mean is named Toorbul on the sketch and Mr Bigge told me that papa used to talk of making that a place for shipping, a proposal which amused Mr Bigge a good deal I think, because he laughed in the nice good-natured way which he often does when anything strikes him as being very funny. In approaching Toorbul I noticed that we passed thro' a long stretch of shoal water, perhaps a mile or two off shore. The channel must be close under the island at the entrance and for some distance up, but so long as we had 8 or 10 inches of water we were quite content. A couple of miles inside Toorbul we overtook a small cutter with 2 men in her. Seeing that we with our little pocket handkerchiefs of sails were overhauling him he crowded on all sail including half a squaresail, but it was of no use for we passed him easily on account of our great length and small draught the ebb tide also being a further advantage to us. So he sheered off into deep water leaving us to look out for a good camping place for the night. After sticking in the mud and trying to find the hardest mud on both sides we decided on the Bribie side tho' the land was low, because we should not have as much mud to wade thro' to get ashore. Most of us took off our shoes and stockings. We then set to work and carried all the things to dry land. One lighted a fire, another put up the tent or unpacked the hamper and spread out a piece of sacking for table cloth and covered it with tin plates, pannikins, corned beef, bread etc etc and when the large tin pot was declared to boil somebody put in a handful of tea gave it a stir, and then supper was pronounced to be ready. We all squatted down on the ground and set to work with a will. All this time the sand flies (my first acquaintance with them) and mosquitos were having a rare feed off ourselves which I daresay they enjoyed quite as much as we did ours. By this time it was quite dark but we had a lantern which we hung up in the midst.

As we did not know where to find fresh water and had brought just enough with us for the voyage we were only allowed a pannikin full of tea each which to some of us was short allowance and we sipped our tea very carefully and wished for more. After supper came pipes and then we spread out our blankets and prepared to turn in for the night. Some inside the tent and others including myself, near the fire outside as it was too hot in the tent. And then we tried to sleep which was the signal for the mosquitos to begin to bite hard. Some of us had taken the precaution to bring a large piece of mosquito net which we put round our heads and it was pleasant to hear these tormentors buzzing about outside and in a great rage because they could not get at us. One who had no net could not sleep at all but lay kicking about all night. Next morning at daylight we got up and commenced our toilet by putting on the wet clothes of the previous day which was the most disagreeable part of it for we had to do this every morning. Whilst breakfast was getting ready I took a look round and on the opposite side of Channel and about 10 or 12 miles off we saw a wonderful group of mountains called the Glasshouses which papa remembers very well and near which he lived for many years. In the early morning light it was a beautiful sight with the mist still hanging about them and the level morning rays of the sun lighting them up like a fairy scene. They are the most curious mountains I have ever seen, some of them like huge sugar loaves in shape standing up grandly out of the level plain. Whilst taking a hurried sketch of the outline I was interrupted by a call to breakfast, but what you see on the next page will give you some idea of the shape of these curious objects. In the course of this day in continuing our voyage up the channel we had many glimpses of them thro' breaks in the numerous islands with which the passage is studded and they were always a striking object in the landscape which would otherwise have been tame and monotonous. Thinking to shorten the distance we kept well on the Bribie side trusting that our light draught would carry us over everything but we were mistaken, for after pulling for an hour or so mostly thro' very shoal water we fairly stuck fast and as we should have had to go back a couple of miles to regain the deep channel, we preferred waiting till the rising tide should take us over. For hundreds of yards all round us there was nothing but mud banks with a few inches of water on them and these are the favorite haunts of the stingarees and small sharks whose dorsal fins and tails were to be seen moving about in numbers. One of us amused himself by chasing one so as to try and get him near the boat where another stood armed with the boat hook ready to have a dig at him, but he was too knowing and got away.

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Well, after sticking in the mud for about an hour the tide rose sufficiently to float us over, so off we went again catching two or



three pretty glimpses of the Glasshouses on our way for at this time we were at about our nearest point to them. It was near this place that we saw a small punt lying on the mud on the bank and on getting nearer we were surprised to see something like a human head just over the stern. On coming close we found what we call a white but which you would have called a very dirty and almost black man stretched out in the punt at full length and by and by he took the trouble to raise himself on his elbows but he was too lazy to get up when we hailed him. We wanted to find out where we could get a supply of fresh water, but the fellow said he didn't know, which we thought was a fib and so we left him in disgust. I think he must have found it rather warm lying that way in the blazing sun. We supposed he was a timber-getter, a class of men who frequent the channel, the banks of which produce a kind of pine. Very useful. These men must lead a wild savage kind of life. This was the last human being we saw on our way up. I must not forget to tell you that all along the channel we saw numbers of wild fowl — such beautiful black swans, very graceful. Pelicans — cranes — plovers and eagles also and hawks

contained house. There must be troubles in these families too, for many of the shells are empty and the former occupants have possibly found an untimely grave in the maw of a hungry pelican — but I should not be surprised if many of them die a natural death because they must be above water exposed to the hot sun for many hours every day which must be very trying to animals of that nature, I should think. In some places we could pick these lumps off the bottom, sitting in the boat. We used to put them on the fire to roast which was the quickest way of opening them and they were pronounced very good cooked in that way. About the middle of the day we began to lose the flood tide which was setting in from the Bay. I should think this was near Cooroomboom creek. Then we had slack water and presently we got into the ebb tide which was setting out thro' the northern entrance into the open sea. This pleased us a good deal and me in particular as it confirmed a conjecture I had hazarded in the morning and removed any doubt there may have been in the minds of the others about my uncommon knowingness on nautical matters. But we shall never get to the end of our voyage at this rate



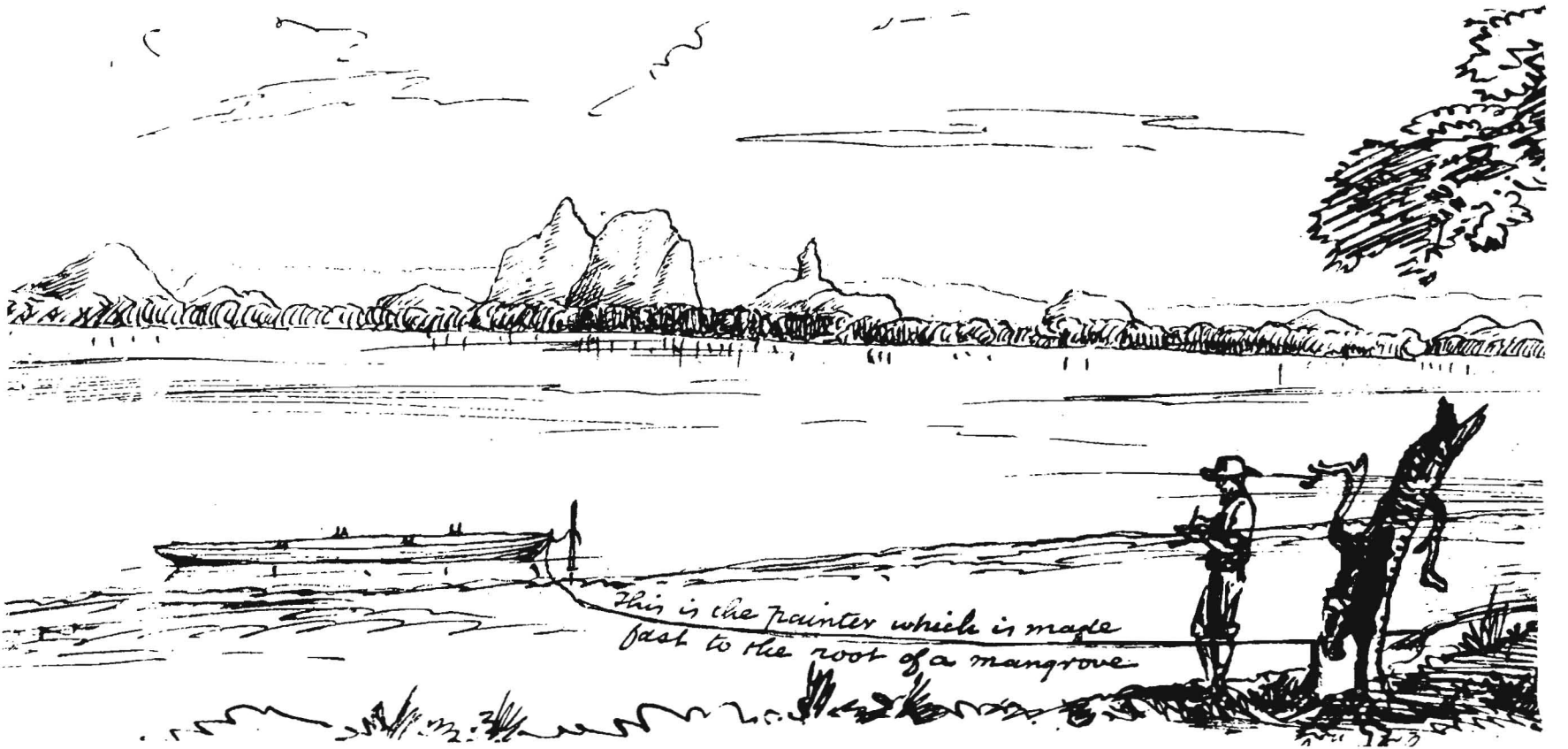
besides quantities of black duck but we seldom got within shot and it is well we had not to depend upon the gun for our provisions, for we killed nothing. The gun was a French breach-loader for cartridge and cap all in one. It was beautiful to see so many birds running about the mud flats picking up worms and such-like food. I should think they (the birds not the worms) must have fine times of it with plenty to eat and little to disturb their digestions. The water teems with fish, great and small and as for oysters I never saw anything like it. This day we saw something like a reef of rock about 3 feet out of water and 300 yards long. On pulling up to see what it was we found it to be a huge and apparently solid bed of oysters, big enough to load several large ships. But they are not so fine as the English ones. They grow together in lumps about the size of your head and each lump may contain from 10 to 20 oysters who are probably brothers and sisters, so that the whole bed may be compared to a large city and each lump to a family, each member of which lives in a self

so we must stretch to our oars again but not for long, because the winds now favored us and we had scarcely to pull another stroke till we came in sight of the sea. But before we get there I must tell you that there was evidence of our being near it many miles before we got to it in the continuous hoarse roar of the surf on the sea-board of Bribie — for you will observe that the northern extremity of the island falls away to a narrow spit of land, so that tho' we were miles away from the entrance we were sometimes within a few yards of the sea itself which we could have reached in a few minutes by landing and walking across.

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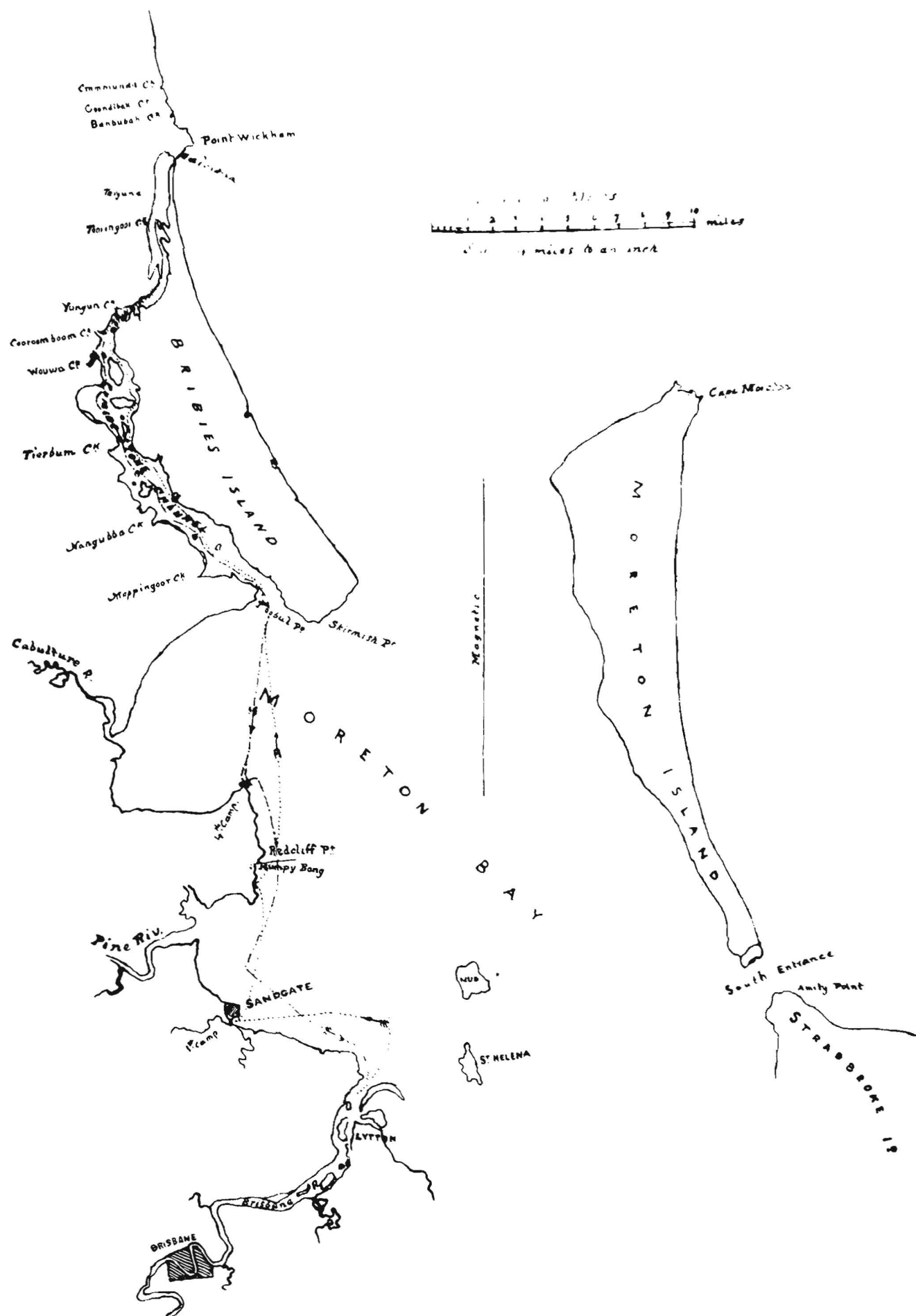
At this time we were under sail with a strong ebb tide which took us along at a great rate. At last on rounding a sand spit there was a cry of "the sea! the sea! !" and there it was sure enough, but all we could see of it was the white crests of the huge rollers





BEERWAN  
 visible 70  
 miles

GLASSHOUSE MOUNTAINS



APRIL 1865.



as they reared themselves up many feet high, then made a long mad rush and finally dashed themselves to pieces on the beautiful white sandy beach outside. Of course it was no use attempting to go outside with such a boat as ours — so we lost no time in making her snug inside the bar and then we scampered along the sand and in a few minutes we were rolling about in the surf and had one of the best bathes I ever had. It was such fun. We went in about 20 yards, where the water would not have reached much above our knees if it had been calm, and allowed the breakers to wash over us, but sometimes they were so big that we were carried away by them and tumbled heels over head in towards the shore. The best of bathing in the surf is that there is no fear of sharks tho' there are plenty of them in still water. This place is called Caloundra. It would make a capital sea bathing place as there are beautiful sites for houses and there is good garden soil, but it is too far from Brisbane to be much frequented for such a purpose for many years to come. Had time permitted and had we been able to get thro' the surf with the boat we should have liked very much to go to the Mooloolah river where a good trade is carried on in Cypress pine, but it was no use thinking of that, and having now reached the extreme point of our voyage we prepared to turn homewards. So we launched the boat and after pulling very hard against the tide for a couple of miles we came to the place marked 3d camp and there we went thro' the usual processes of cooking, eating and sleeping and next morning early we continued our homeward journey. We worked away steadily at the oars till about lunch time when we went ashore having first picked up some lumps of oysters which we roasted. This must have been nearly opposite Tierbum Creek on Bribie. We had just finished lunch and were enjoying our pipes when I heard a great splash splash

in the water close to us, but out of sight on account of the mangroves. I thought it was a big shark and was just going to see when we heard the same noise again and before we knew where we were what should jump right in amongst us from the water but a great old man kangaroo. I think he was the biggest I ever saw and I was rather frightened at first, but he did not pay us a long morning visit, for so soon as he found what company he was in he made two or three tremendous jumps and in a few moments was out of sight amongst the timber. This was a very curious adventure for the kangaroo is very timid and afraid of men. I was very glad that one of us who rushed to the boat for the gun did not get a shot at him. He was not quite so big as he looks in the picture which would make him about 17 feet high. But I should think he stood about 7 feet. When we had recovered from our astonishment we packed up the things and made another start and presently we had a fair wind. When going over a bank we came across the biggest shark I have seen in Australia. He was of an ugly greyish colour. He did not see us till he was close under our side so that if one of us had only had the boat hook ready we might have stuck it into him. The wind and tide now carried us fast towards Toorbul where I think I mentioned the shore is so pretty. It was now getting rather late for venturing across Caboolture bay but the wind was fair, so we could not resist and stood boldly out. The wind lasted only about  $\frac{1}{2}$  way across and then we took to the oars with a will for we were getting rather frightened in case it should come on rough before we got ashore at Redcliff where it is unsafe to land in dark on account of the reefs and sharp rocks which surround it for a mile or so from shore. However we did get ashore at Camp No. 4 just at dusk at low water which compelled us to pull the boat close up



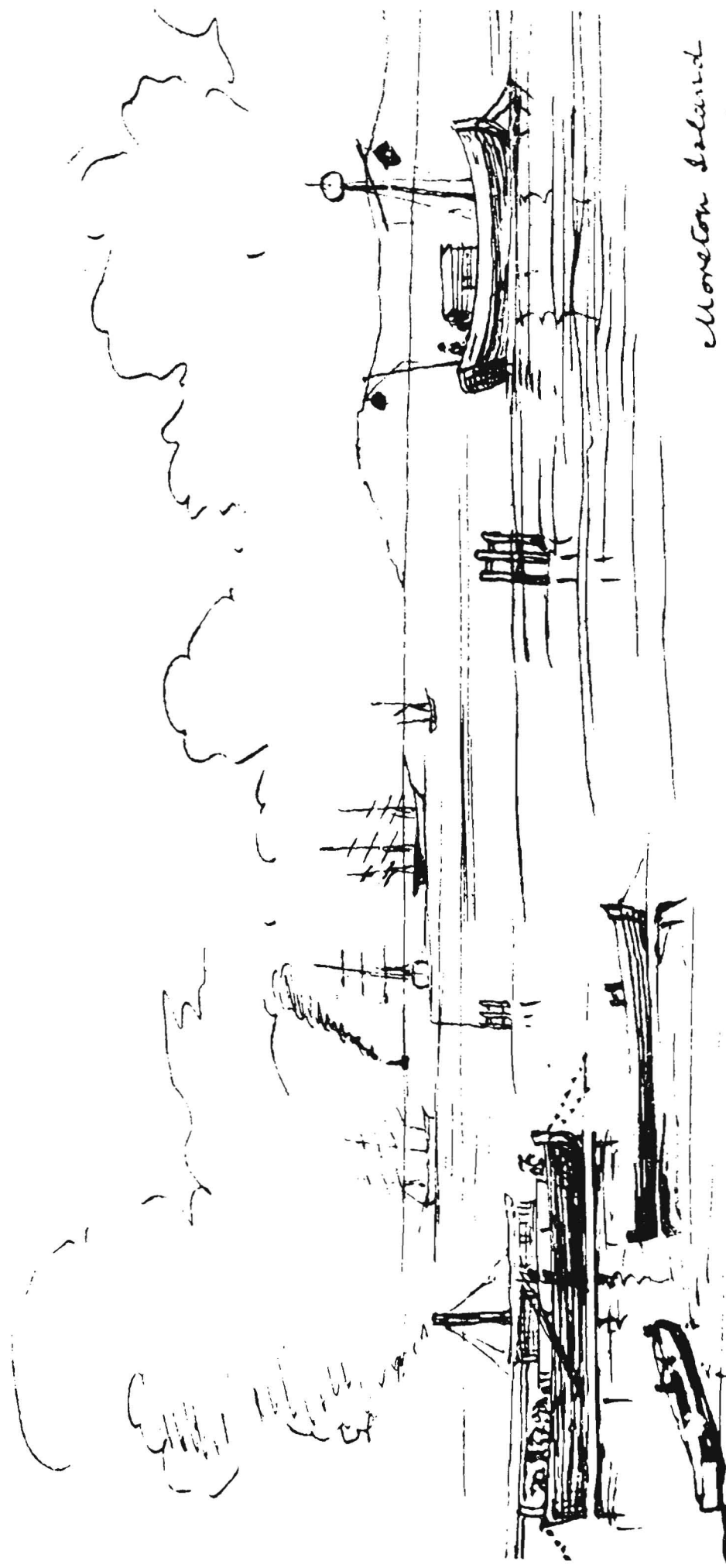
to the edge of the cliff which was just at high water mark at the foot of it. We pitched our tent on the cliff — it is only about 15 or 20 feet high — and after feeding, it came on a heavy rain squall, so we were lucky to get ashore when we did. We had now to set a watch over the boat so that she should not get knocked to pieces when the tide rose. My watch was just at high tide about 1 or 2 in the morning, so I got into the water and held on to her stern well enough for some time but by and by she shipped two or three pretty heavy seas aft and I could steady her no longer. I was just thinking of bawling out for help when I thought the tide shewed signs of falling and to my great joy she gradually settled comfortably into the sand. It was now a fine moonlight night, and the water then as during the whole of our trip was so nice and warm that there was no hardship in being wet all day up to the knees, for the sun was quite warm too. I was very glad to turn in again under my blanket till daylight when we all turned out and commenced the labours of our last day out. It was almost a dead calm but looked threatening with fine angry looking clouds over Moreton Island, so we pulled well in towards Sandgate

instead of making a straight course for the mouth of the Brisbane river. There is little more to tell, for we caught the tide and a breeze after we got into the river which took us within six miles of home and by that time we had got so used to the oars that we came in at the Customs House steps with a spurt, very hot, very dirty and very thirsty, so you may suppose we enjoyed a good wash in fresh water and an iced drink. And this is the end of our great trip to Bribie and I shall not be sorry when we have such another . . .

Your affectionate uncle Sandy.

I forgot to say that we fortunately found water at Caloundra. The leader of the party was looking about for it in a gully where the grass was very long when he tumbled into what proved to be a well of excellent water. We could not make up our minds whether it was natural or artificial. We were thus enabled to replenish our keg which was getting very low. Here we saw several specimens of the pandanus, a curious tree bearing a fruit resembling the pine apple.





Moreton Island  
Lighthouse

Black Ball Liners.

The dredge  
9 p.m.

Mouth of the Brisbane.